

Pam  
Africa - Congo  
(Congo)

# ESCAPE FROM CONGO



by Yonama Angondia

The gripping story of  
an African Christian  
who led 195 of his  
fellow Africans to safety.



*One of the stations evacuated by the Africa Inland Mission during the recent revolt in Congo was Oicha. This was the large medical work where Dr. Carl Becker and a dedicated staff of missionaries and Africans cared for an average of 2,000 patients a day. As the rebel forces neared the station the missionaries were forced to leave but the African staff stayed behind feeling that they would be safe.*

*The following graphic account was written by the African Director of the medical work who kept the work open until he too found it necessary to flee. This is a translation of his own story of the flight.*

## ESCAPE FROM CONGO

BY YONAMA ANGONDIA

**A**FTER THE DEPARTURE of the missionaries, many strange things happened as the enemy penetrated the area. The enemy entered one village near the border between Irumu and Beni. There, the National Army fought with them and killed 400 rebels. The National Army carried all those dead to Oicha and Beni, and threw them into the large Semiliki River. Later the rebels appeared again at Kasindi. There again the Army fought with them and defeated them. After this, they fought on the Mombasa road at Magina. The Army was again victorious. But then the Army left the area and things became difficult. Everyone in the villages carried arrows, spears, or machetes, but these were no match for the well-equipped rebels who now came in with heavy machinery and many weapons. They cut and moved the large trees that had been felled in the road and came through during the night. Men who had been guarding their village ran to us to tell us they were coming. This was about 8:00 A.M. on the 23rd of September.

After this we began preparing for and planning our evacuation. The night of the 23rd, about 2:00 A.M. I started gathering the people of the hospital, the nurses, the pastors and some of the sick. They left by way of a stream running from the mission to the East of the hospital. I sent them to a hill 5 kilometers away and told them to stay there. — I stayed at the Mission alone all day and night of the 24th getting things prepared for our departure. I started the generator for electric lights, went around and checked on all the houses, and also made rounds at the hospital so that the sick people would not be frightened. They took it for granted that I was still working as usual. Because of fear, all of the surrounding village people had moved in to sleep in the hospital area as well.

At 8:00 the next morning the National Army came to me for medicine after having walked all night from Magina via Kasindi and Erengeti to see where the enemy had entered. I immediately gave them medicine

and told them, "Go quickly." They left by 9:00 A.M. and very soon after that we began hearing much gunfire and many explosions, so we knew that they were really fighting. The fighting continued until 10:00 o'clock at which time the strength of the National Army gave out.

The group of people which I had sent from the Mission Station heard all this gunfire clearly, but they proceeded directly to the hill as I had instructed. Many of the National Army soldiers died, and the few who were left got into about six trucks and retreated. They yelled at the people along the road, "Get away from the road because our strength is finished." So the people started running into the bush, some going from 2 to 5 kilometers, leaving the roads deserted. From then right on to 12:00 o'clock we continued to hear gunfire as it approached closer to the Mission. By 1:00 or 1:30 they had come right to the outskirts of the mission on the Beni side. They had heavy weapons, 20 armored cars, machine guns and cannons. They made a circle around the Mission about a kilometer long. The people in the hospital began to be very fearful because of the gunfire and its approach to the Station.

I went out in front of the Hospital to see what was going on. Immediately I could see that shells were being fired around the church building, from the Kano road (where I had previously gotten the people through), from the Beni road, and also across the valley toward our homes. It seemed like a line of fire one kilometer long surrounded us and this line was closing in toward the station. I could no longer stand in the yard because bullets seemed to be flying everywhere. The sick in the Hospital started asking me what they should do. I gathered them all in the Hospital, told those who were too sick to get under the beds and then sent the rest out by the passageway to the Operating area. While I was in the Hospital, the rebels were on the Hospital grounds, and when they started to enter the Hospital, I made my exit out the west side. I went down into the steam-

bed and immediately they started following me. I was now leading the sick who could walk and the rebels were shooting at us.

People from the leper colony called to me to come and hide in their houses quickly. The rebels were shooting from the slopes of the stream and some people thought I had fallen, but I told them, "No, I haven't fallen yet." There was constant gunfire above our heads because the rebels were firing from both sides of the stream. Some of the sick said I should try to get to a house and hide, but I said, "No, I won't enter a house, because they would just follow me there." They followed me through the leper camp, constantly shooting for about an hour until I came to the Oicha river. I followed the river itself so that their gunfire was going over my head. The sick people following me were very frightened, but not one was wounded. We followed through the river and up the opposite bank. They started shooting at us again so I told everybody, "Fall to the ground." "Walk on your knees and put leaves and shrubbery on your head." So we started moving like snakes on our stomachs.

In this way we continued through the bush while they shot through the grass over our heads. When I wanted to cross to another side I told those who were too weak to go any further, that they should lie down in that spot while those that could would continue to follow me. I told those that stayed that we would shake the grass as we went so that the rebels would follow us with their gunfire, but they would only be hitting the grass over our heads. We again followed the Oicha river, walking through the tall grass. They were continually firing over our heads and they followed us for two hours, but God spared all our lives. When we came to the place where the Oicha and Asefu rivers meet, I continued to go between the two rivers. I kept on walking through the bush about 5 kilometers from 2:00 P.M. until 6:00 P.M. I finally came to a hunter's camp and waited there overnight.

The next morning I sent some one back to the Mission to see what damage had been done. Those who had been guarding there said that 7 people had been killed. One of them was a teacher, now turned shop owner, named Gidiona, whom they killed right in his home. They also killed the "Adjutant" of the soldiers in Beni, and others were killed by stray bullets. The rebels thought I was in Doctor's office at his house, so they broke all the windows there. They searched thoroughly for Dr. Becker because they wanted to kill him first. When they couldn't find him, they wanted to kill me in his place. At this time they sent me word saying, "Yonama, we saw you when you es-

caped and although we shot at you, the shots would not hit you. Because of this we wanted you to stay here so you could show us the workings of the Hospital, but you did wrong by escaping. Therefore you should return, because we won't leave unless we see you first."

I then sent a man back again to find out how and why the people had been killed. He found that on some of them they had cut open their skulls so that they could remove the brains. On others they cut out pieces of flesh and then they sewed them up again. They put guards over the Mission and Hospital so no one could disrupt anything. I had told the man that I sent, "Hurry back because I know that planes will be coming to bomb." That did happen at 11:00 A.M., and altogether they dropped 16 bombs. At this time I told those who had followed me this far that I was going to move on, but that they should stay at that place.

From there, I and one other man continued through the Ituri Forest following near the Ituri River. All day long we travelled in the underbrush through mud and swamps until evening when we came close to the main road. I was now going to the place I had sent the original group of people to the east of the Hospital.

At 7:00 A.M. on the 25th, I came to my garden beyond the main road and there I talked with those who were guarding my garden. At 8:00 A.M. I left them and continued on to my home which is at "Kilometer One" from Oicha. From there I left them and I left the Oicha road and made my way east. I walked all night with rain beating down the whole time, because I didn't want any one from Oicha to know where I was going. I walked until I came to the Hill, and at 7:00 A.M. I met up with those who had preceded me there. (This was the 26th.) All the pastors, nurses, Christians, children and wives gathered quickly and I told them how God had led me from Oicha, and how He had brought us together again. They had received word that I had been cut up with a knife until I died, so I assured them that God had surely saved my life and that it was only by God's power that we had come together again.

Now I said to them, "The time had come for us to start moving. We can't stay here, because they will come and kill us all. So we must cross the Semiliki." I therefore went ahead in case there were any enemies along the way who might give us a difficult time. I kept a little way ahead of the rest of the group.

As we left that hill, I met 11 soldiers from the National Army who had been in the battle before. They said to me, "We are

thankful that you are alive, but you must not leave because we might have to call on you. You must not leave this home because the planes will be back to drop bombs." I said to them, "I am just going to this village to get some food." I did not let them know that I was going to cross the border. As we came to another road, we entered Poto, an unfriendly village. The people there said, "You must not go, because Dr. Becker put you as Director to help us with operations, maternity, and other medicines. If you go we will all die. Because of this you cannot go!" The Chief there called all the people of the village together. The big men of the village all had arrows, spears, or machetes, and the head man had a gun. He said I should tell them where I was going. They would not let me leave. They said they would make me a home in the bush. They gave us a place to sleep, so I went to get all my people settled in.

One of the Christians of the village called me to the side. He said, "These people are saying that you shouldn't go because they want to give you over to the enemy, the rebels. Others say they will leave you in the bush, and some say they will kill you, therefore be very careful in talking to them." I therefore gathered my thoughts quickly while I was getting our people settled down. As I returned to the group, they were talking in their language, Kindoba. Then they said to me, "Now tell us truthfully what is on your mind." I said, "We have a dispensary across the valley at Luonoli, so I and the pastors and nurses want to take our wives, children, and young girl nurses to stay there. Once we have gotten our families there, we nurses will return to do the work at Oicha. At the moment things are bad at Oicha because planes are coming in with bombs and the work cannot continue as usual. We want to wait a bit to see if things will get better." They replied, "That won't do, because the people and nurses of Luonoli won't help us. The Talingas are difficult people and they won't let us go over there. Our hospital is Oicha, so you will stay here. We will make a house for you in the tall grass so that the rebels won't find you and we will guard you well." Then I said, "You have reasoned this out well. For myself, I could agree, but for the hungry children it just won't do. For now I will have to lead the children over there, then I will return to see the place you have prepared for me so I can stay here and wait." They said, "All right, if you want to take these people there, and you don't want to listen to us, you will have to pay 15,000 francs before we will let you go. But, you must return." "Good," I said, "But I left all the francs at Oicha. This whole thing caught me in the midst of my work

and I didn't have time to think of francs. I have a few francs in my pocket, but if you want, go ahead and lead my people to safety and I will give you these few francs. Then you can take me and hand me over to the rebels like you want to. The rebels have already shot at me for two hours and couldn't hit me. Now I want to tell you something! For twenty years I have stayed amongst you. I have helped Dr. Becker with your children, your wives, and many of your people, so you have been helped over and over again. Just this week I helped one of your men with a strangulated hernia and he is still alive today. Therefore, if you are not thankful for all I've done for you, go ahead and give me over to the enemy. But you must lead these wives, nurses, pastors, and children to safety. I don't know if God will deliver me from your hands."

When they heard this they began to melt. They said, "All right, because of all you have done for us these many years, we will only charge you 3,000 francs." I said, "Fine, I have 3,000 francs here," and I gave the francs to them. Then they said, "Now you may go with all the nurses, children, wives, and nursing students. You may go on over and you must make a good hospital and dispensary there. If possible you will open the way so that we and our people can come to you for medicine. However, because Pastor Zefania is a Nandi, he and the other Nandis must stay with us, together with those who are from the Mbuba tribe. The chief of the Talingas across the border would do them harm. But all you others can go ahead." We were then free to go, but before leaving we had a meeting with them. I prayed much that many would accept Christ and that they would cling to that faith and follow God.

There was one man with us from Sumaline. Now they started talking about him, saying to me, "You can go with all your people, but why did you bring this different colored man with you? Maybe you should return him to the rebels so that they can kill him or wound him." So I said, "This man came with us because he was at the Hospital. I gave him a bed because he was very sick. He is from the 'Societe du Ituri,' and he usually transports palm fat for us there. Now if some one is sick, I do not choose them because of color; I try to help every one. This man was on his way back to Beni, but the battle hindered his return and caused him to flee with us. We have been together in the bush, and God has entrusted his life into my hands. So if you want to fight with this man you are fighting with the sick in general. You should, therefore, give this man the opportunity of going with us." The Chief replied, "Yonama paid for all the Hospital people and he has done



well to give us the 3,000 francs. If he wants it, we should let the man go along with him right now." They immediately started saying goodbye to us so we could leave. I quickly sent a Christian to tell all our people to get ready and had one of the nurses see that every one was there and ready to go.

The man who had been guarding Doctor's house had remained at Oicha. I had kept some of the Hospital keys with me, so now I sent a boy back to Oicha with these words, "These keys need to go back because they are for the office. You should give them to Yoane personally to hide above the office. Tell him that I am going on now, but when I return I want to find them right there. Yoane will give them to the nurse in charge, whom I left there because he is from the Mbuba tribe. His name is Ofeni. The two nurses I left in charge of the leper colony are Paul Kamba and Fanweli, because they are from the Nandi and Suti tribes respectively. These three nurses were left there because the rebels seem to accept people from these three tribes. There is one other man there named Michele. The rebels have brought their nurses to work along with the others there and they have been guarding the medicines closely." The messenger seemed very glad to take those keys back to Yoane.

I followed the road above the Semiliki along with the fellow from Sumaline. After we had gone about 10 kilometers, a friend of mine from Oicha caught up with us on a bike. He said, "They are searching diligently for you. They know you are going to Uganda, so you must hurry on." He gave me his bike and told me to hurry ahead. I rode on to the Semiliki and there I met fishermen among whom I found several friends. I spoke to them, saying, "The nurses are following, so if they come to you here at night you should give them a place to sleep." They replied, "We will guard them." I told them I was planning to cross over to the dispensary at Luanoli. They said that we couldn't cross the Semiliki because the Chief on the other side had put up a big barrier and was guarding it closely with men who had arrows, spears, machetes, and if I tried to cross over they would kill me. I said to them, "Don't worry about me, the way will open before me."

When the people following me came to this place they were very frightened by the news of this trouble across the Semiliki and they thought they couldn't cross. They also heard rumors to the effect that fishermen had killed the man who was with me, they had cut off his head and thrown it into the water.

God helped me to open the way quickly

for all our people. When I arrived on the other side, the Chief had actually put men with arrows, spears, etc. to guard. But when I saw these men I found that many of them had been to Oicha for treatment and others had actually worked in my garden, so when they saw me their faces lighted up. No one had ever come over to them to give them the Gospel because every one was fearful of the area. Actually, I found I was amongst friends and they said, "Greetings! Open the barrier quickly." Then I said to them, "Will you give me a place to sit down as I am very tired?" They immediately yelled, "Bring a chair quickly." So we conversed for a while and I told them about the battles that had taken place. I said to them, "You rebels, who told you to put up this barrier and guard like this?" They replied, "Chief Baskari." I told them, "He has put you in a position of sure death. The rebels don't like barriers, or spears, or arrows, or machetes. If they find people doing this they will kill the whole village. You have set yourselves up to be killed." At this they began to be frightened. We continued to talk for a while. Then they said, "You write a letter to the Chief, and because you are tired he will come to get you. You should tell the Chief all you have told us, because he has put us in this position." The people there gave us fish and started preparing other food for us. They took care of the bike that I had been travelling on and I started eating. The Chief came quickly and as soon as I finished eating he said, "Now tell me all about this." I told him about the situation and then I suggested that he should accompany me across the border with all those who held any position in the government, because the rebels didn't like any one who was connected with the government. I told him that the rebels had been killing those in authority, the police, and soldiers. Therefore those holding bows and arrows would be killed with the other villagers. This scared the Chief and every one in the area so that they took down the barrier and threw the pieces far away because they knew they wouldn't be safe behind a barrier.

I told the chief about those who were coming behind me and told him there would be about 200 of them. I also asked him to instruct the villagers that they should let them pass through unharmed — because we were going on ahead. The Chief stayed there for the moment and gave me his truck to take me to his camp, so we piled in some women, children and things to go to the Chief's "city." When we arrived there, I left all the people at the Chief's place, Kamango, and I went to sleep with the African Pastor at Kamango. I told the Pastor that there were pastors and people

coming behind. I suggested that he should go along with us across to Uganda. "But," I told him, "Right now I am going across to Luanoli to close up the medical work there and pack up the medicines, and also to talk with the medical committee there."

The next morning another friend of mine came by bike to tell me to hurry on my way. So I started off to Luanoli and told the pastor to continue on toward Uganda when my people arrived. When I came to the dispensary, I called all the sick people together and gave them the news. Then I told them all to hold on to their medical cards, because at Oicha the rebels had destroyed all the medical records. I talked to the Church people along with the elders and the medical committee saying, "I am closing the dispensary here along with all the medicines. I haven't decided whether we will take them to Uganda or hide them here." So we worked at packing the medicines. Very shortly my friend on the bicycle came again and said, "The rebels are only 7 kilometers behind you. You told me the nurses would pack the medicines and you would go on across to Uganda. Why are you waiting here?"

Therefore, my friend along with the Christians of that place wouldn't let me go back to the regular road to Uganda. They took me up to Mt. Ruwenzori, part of the time pushing me on the bike because by this time my strength was finished. The Chief's men along with the Christians pushed me until we came right to the Uganda border. At that point I said "Goodbye" to Congo and crossed the river that runs along the border. All the rest of our group had preceded me and were together at Bundibugio.

(NOTE: Altogether, Yonama led out 195 people from Oicha into Uganda. This group was comprised of pastors, nurses, their wives and children and some patients. These were mostly people who were working at Oicha, but whose homes are elsewhere in Congo. This does not include the many along the way who joined with them and came over.)

## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS BY YONAMA:

When the rebels enter a place, they do not kill every one. They pick out those who do not follow along with what they say, or those who are wearing good clothes, or any one who is working for, or friendly with the Central Government, or Church leaders and Christians if some one will accuse them of doing something wrong. They don't go around killing women and children, unless stray bullets happen to hit them. They want to kill any one who has any wealth at all.

All the Christians, the Hospital staff, Pastors, children, every one big and small, walked out on foot, each carrying a small bag of some sort. Some got sores on their feet, others swelled up, and many others got sick, but God protected us all and not one died on the way. Every one of them came safely into Uganda. After getting the nurses across the Semiliki, word travelled fast back to Oicha to the effect that Yonama had crossed over to Matalinga with the nurses. So the rebels sent their men after them to the seventh kilometer where the Oicha people had been hiding at first. At that point, the rebels ran out of ammunition and had to go back for more. They sent out the "Jeunesse" to pick up the people in order to kill them, or else to bring them back to Oicha in order to kill them there.

At the place where I paid 3,000 francs to get through, the Chief and his police along with their leader, Mbema, ran into the bush to hide. They were found and taken back to Oicha tied with their hands behind their backs. Two nurses, Suzana and Yakobede, who joined us later (they stayed behind at Oicha to help with some last minute cases), said they saw these eight men with their own eyes, and that the rebels shot and killed them because they had let our party go through their village. Surely, God gave us wisdom in dealing with them there, otherwise we would have been returned with them to Oicha to be killed.

---

Please add to your prayer list the African Church in this hour of great persecution. Many of its members have died for the faith. Others, like Yonama, have been forced to flee to neighboring lands. But thousands of Christians remain in the Congo and for them we must hold up holy hands of prayer that their faith will not fail.

---

## AFRICA INLAND MISSION

253 HENRY STREET  
28 WELLESLEY STREET E.  
3 JOHN STREET  
62-A CHISHOLM ROAD  
P. O. BOX 3644

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK 11201  
TORONTO 5, ONTARIO, CANADA  
LONDON, W. C. 1, ENGLAND  
AUBURN, N. S. W., AUSTRALIA  
CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

PRINTED IN U.S.A.